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ABSTRACT

Although young children have no influence on the political process, they do have ardent advocates in Canada, Sweden, and the United States. Decision makers and advocate groups in the three countries, however, differ rather markedly, with Canada taking a middle course between the factionalized United States and the highly integrated Sweden. In the United States, a wide array of diverse categorical programs exists under several governmental jurisdictions. Neither major political party has begun a clear child care policy initiative. American child caregivers are atomized in small, competitive, and often isolated groups. In Ontario, programs for young children are located in several different, but cooperative, agencies. Major Canadian parties have been increasingly active proponents of a public role for children; and effective advocates, such as the women's movement's "Status of Women Canada," provide ministries with information and research on children's needs. In Sweden, early childhood programs are administered by the Central Board of Welfare Services in conjunction with municipal education committees. Political parties are brokers in national preschool politics; and Swedish interest groups are quintessential political bureaucracies with formalized input in preschool policymaking. While forms, achievements, and processes vary among the three countries, child care issues are unlikely to disappear from the countries' public agendas in the future. (RH)

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CHILD-CARE SPOKESPEOPLE IN THREE COUNTRIES:

A Comparison between Sweden, Canada and the United States

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INTRODUCTION

Although, there are some marked variations between the size, economies, and cultures of Sweden, Canada and the United States, there are many important similaries. Each is an advanced industrial country with problems of the cities, of minorities, and so forth. Traditionally, in all three countries, child care, especially for young children, has been the province of the family. But, recently with women entering the work force, the growth of the feminist movement and the like, changes in child-care arrangements have characterized each. In all three countries, there has been much pressure for extensive public support for child care (Kahn & Kamerman, 1977). The United States with its federal system and large population has encouraged a fragmentation of child-care services and programs (Zigler and Gordon, 1982). Canada, like the United States, is a federal system with many variations in child-care practices from province to province. Canada arrived at children as a public issue more recently than the other two countries as women entered the work force later and at lower numbers. Nonetheless, at this time, there appears to be more interest coming from the federal government for child care than is found in the U.S. (Montgomery, 1986). Within huge variations from place to place in both countries, the development of young children does not seem to be a high national priority. Sweden, on the other hand, as a comparatively small centralized society, came to be recognized as "child oriented" relatively early. Their integrated child-care system of center-based arrangements emphasizes the development of children as an important and publicized national goal (Dodge, 1979, p. 255).

THE ACTORS: SPOKESPEOPLE FOR CHILDREN

Decision-makers and advocate groups, contrast rather markedly in the three countries. Sweden has a consensus-building and highly integrated political system. That

is to say, the Swedes are represented by interest groups-including those for children that are highly centralized, well disciplined, and closely affiliated with the political parties. In part, this stems from the overall role that such groups play in their systems of multi-party proportional representation. The Swedish political parties are more clearly an embodiment of particular social class than the rather heterogeneous socio-economic mix of America's two-party system (Castles, 1978, p. 453) or of Canada's several parties. Secondly, interest groups have institutionalized policy involvement through a procedure called "remiss," where government ministries and appointed commissions are obliged to consult all interest groups affected by a given policy proposal (Castles, 1978, p. 452).

In the United States, in contrast, there are many more interest groups which tend to be small and less formal. Every issue seen as important in the U. S. has a number of competing groups striving to have influence on specific factions within the political parties or upon the separate units or levels of government. The child-care issue seems to have especially elicited these competing voices (Beck, 1982). Canada appears to have taken a mid course between the factionalized U. S. and the highly integrated Sweden. Interest groups are typically more deferential to established authority than are their counterparts in the U. S. (Anderson, 1981). Although there are a great number of child-focused advocacy groups throughout Canada, many of the more important ones are often consulted or called on for expert advice on child-oriented issues (Sweeney, 1986).

→ The structural dimensions which are useful for comparison in the child-care arena include: public actors (elected and non-elected governmental officials), and private actors (interest groups and unorganized publics). In the United States, there is a wide array of diverse categorical programs under several government jurisdictions. Consequently, policy making for the young child is scattered across a multitude of legis-

lative committees and executive agencies at the federal, state and local levels of government. At the state level, policymaking coordination is limited by jurisdictional and financial competition and attempts at coalition building. For instance, in the states of Michigan, California, and New York, we (1982) found some interagency conflict over control of childhood programs, with occasional efforts at agency cooptation of child-oriented interest groups in these struggles.

In the Canadian province of Ontario many of the child-care initiatives emerge from the Ministry of Community and Social Services where most interest group demands have been directed. But similar to the situation in American states, programs for young children in Ontario are located in several different agencies. For instance, projects for rural children are located in the Ministry of Agriculture and Food. Interministerial cooperation (Sweeney, 1986), however, seems more characteristic than found in states across the border.

Responsibility for formulating and administering pre-school policy in Sweden is located in the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs while the supervisory function is under the National Board of Health and Welfare (Jaffe, 1979, p. 3). These national agencies primarily provide supervision and so forth, to local governnments. At the local level, pre-school programs are under the auspices of a municipal council, an elected body that reflects the political party composition of the community. In particular, early childhood programs are administered by the Central Board of Welfare Services in conjunction with the Municipal Education Committee. At this level there is considerable coordination with the other welfare servicies (for example, care for the aged). Thus, the Swedish tendency toward compromise produces coherent and functional child-care programs.

In the U. S., some Democrats were active proponents of children's programs in the 1960s and 1970's. The Great Society with its war on poverty programs including

Head Start was a high point of federal action for children. However, neither the Democratic nor the Republican party has taken a clear policy initiative in the cause of especially young children. By contrast, although Canada has had nothing comparable to the Great Society, the major Canadian parties have been increasingly active proponents of a public role for children. The Liberal party, for example, prior to its recent defeat commissioned a government study on child-care needs. The other parties have also joined in this effort with the New Democrats urging more federal day-care support. Moreover, the current Conservative government argues that the need for child care is more than an "add on" to women's issues (Montgomery, 1986).

In Sweden, political parties constitute brokers in national pre-school politics. While Swedish interest groups play a major role, this is primarily accomplished by influencing party leaders and ultimately party platforms. Dodge (1979, p. 260) argues that there is a "Swedish preference (after Erickson and Piaget) for an open preschool clasroom (to instill)....respect of one individual for another..." Certainly, this seems to be an imprtant mode in Sweden. We found, however, at the local level, child-care philosophy and policy tend to mirror the preferences of the political party or parties that dominate in the community. Thus in a municipality that has, for example, a large faction critical of the core institutions, there is often considerable debate over the socialization of pre-school children. As might be expected then, these programs are sometimes influenced by class-conflict values (after Marx) rather than values that emphasize individual development or cooperation (after Erickson).

American early childhood people have been, in large part, atomized into small, competitive and often isolated groups. They speak with many emotional voices (Beck, 1982, p. 311), are often "inexperienced in understanding the political process and in using political strategy" (Sponseller and Fink, 1982, p. 20). Moreover, there are extensive divisions along organizational lines including public (e.g., Head Start), volun-

tary (e.g., Montessori) and proprietary (e.g., Kindercare) child-care organizations often with wide differences in philosophies and thrusts. Therefore, informal and intermittent requests by local childcare practitioners and parents of clients to municipal and state agencies are the most frequent way interests are made known, especially over a controversial issue like licensing. There are, however, a few broadly-based interest groups, such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI), and the Children's Defense Fund (CDF). Such organizations have had some policy influence in transmitting research to policymakers, orchestrating responses to actual or proposed policy changes, and making demands of policymakers. The NAEYC periodically publishes a "Public Policy Alert" on an array of children's issues. For example, they have been long-time advocates for systematic national credentialling in order to obtain "high quality (learning) environments for children," prevent abuse, etc. (NAEYC, 1985). CDF, especially, has been a vigilant "watchdog" on the recent federal and state cuts and as an advocate for Children (Blank, 1983). For example, among other recent proposals, they are asking Congress for "a federally funded informational and referral system that would help maximize existing child care resources" (Blank, 1983, p. 12).

The various types of child-care organizations that have appeared in the U. S. have also emerged in Canada. For example, Kindercare, sometimes known as "Kentucky fried children," is found rather extensively north of the border (Kagan and Glennon, 1982). Moreover, there are also a number of organizations focused on the welfare of children as well, specifically the "Canadian Association for Young Children." The most effective spokespeople, however, appear to be those associated with the womens' movement. One of these has been the "Status of Women Canada." This latter group has been very active in providing various (national and provincial) Canadian

ministeries with information and research on children's needs. Lately, for example, they made a detailed analyses on "child care and parental leave policies" (Status of Women Canada Reports, 1985).

Swedish interest groups, in contrast, are quintessential political bureaucracies with formalized input in preschool policymaking. Unlike their North American counterparts, the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO) has been an important lobby for the rapid expansion of publicly supported preschool facilities and programs. The LO has advocated public operation of pre-school and free-time activities for children whose parents work at inconvenient hours (Schyl-Bjierman, 1977, pp. 3-4).

Parents, as parents, are largely unrepresented in Swedish pre-school interest groups. A combination of tight bureaucratic hierarchies, political party dominance in policymaking and the cultural propensity to defer to expertise or credentials have discouraged individuals and small groups of child-care practitioners. This translates into little meaningful input by consumers on policy (Jaffe, 1979, pp. 3-4). In clear contrast, the American tradition of parental involvement and the recent accountability movement has led to an array of formalized processes for regular parental participation in policy on many levels and in many types of child-care programs. Parental involvement includes parental advisory groups, parental representation of boards of directors, and the inclusion of parents on commitees for hiring staff.

PROJECTIONS

The deep and sustained recession of the early 1980s in the industrial economies lends credence to the assertion that there is a trend away from post-war growth, perhaps even to a no-growth economy (Sederberg and Taylor, 1981). Moreover, there is an emergent political movement of "anti-statism" in many western industrial soc-

ieties most clearly evidenced by the rise of Ronald Reagan in the United States or Brian Mulroney in Canada. Concommitently, we have witnessed a slackening of support to a variety of welfare programs including those for children. In the United States, the continued decline of support for such programs, might well lead to an increased demand for extensive profit-oriented child-care providers which complements American "free enterprise." And although organized interest groups such as the NAEYC will continue to press for expansion of public support, for the immediate future it will be an effort to minimize losses. There seems to be little Congressional sentiment for federal action on child-care programs comparable to the push in the 1960s and the early 1970s.

Sweden seems to have survived both the recent recession and the conservative party interregnum with no less commitment to the welfare of children. They can be justifiably proud of their extensive services. Nonetheless, there seems to some slackening of support for the vast array of welfare services generally (Heckscher, 1984). Some observers have discerned a shift from unlimited services to one based on need. Will the Swedes soon be asking, "who will get what childhood services?" Moreover, a possibly more sophisticated, assertive public might be increasingly unwilling to tolerate the traditional control from the top and demand greater citizen participation in the operation of public policy especially on "family issues." Women with young children may be on the forefront of these demands (see Facts, 1984).

Canada, on the other hand, has recently elected a Conservative government with the associated increase of "privatism." However, child care has not been removed from the public agenda. Interestingly, in contrast to the U.S., conservativism here has meant a strengthening of a public role on "family and "child issues." The push in all three countries has come from newly working and emancipated women who have demanded political equality. In Canada, especially, this has included what has been called "conservative feminism" (Handrick, 1984), or female demands for family sup-

port and child enrichment. This family-oriented conservatism has now linked with the historic policy initiatives by government for child-care support. Therefore, any decline of this support seems unlikely.

Although children, especially young children are clearly "uninfluentials" in the political process, in all three countries they have their ardent spokespeople. The forms vary, the "successes" vary, the processes vary, but the "childrens' cause" is not one which is going away.

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